

Prosperity without Progress

Norman G. Owen



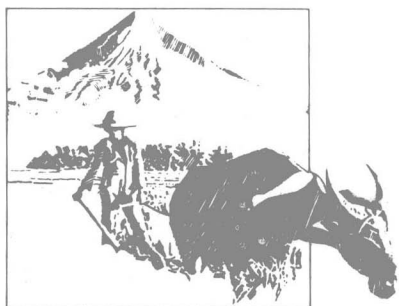
MANILA HEMP AND MATERIAL LIFE
IN THE COLONIAL PHILIPPINES

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TO ROBERTA

ABBREVIATIONS

ACCJ	<i>American Chamber of Commerce Journal</i> (Manila)
AFIO	Archivo Franciscano Ibero-Oriental (Madrid)
AGI	Archivo General de Indias (Seville)
AHN	Archivo Histórico Nacional (Madrid)
BAHC	<i>Bulletin of the American Historical Collection</i> (Manila)
BNM	Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid
Bo.	Barrio
BRPI	Blair and Robertson, <i>The Philippine Islands</i>
Cia.	Compañía (company)
CTJ	<i>Cordage Trade Journal</i> (New York)
D	Documento (document); in MN
D.	Don
DUSCM	USNA, <i>Despatches from United States Consul in Manila</i>
E	Expediente (document, file); in AHN
EGA	Eleccion de Gobernadorcillo, Albay; in PNA
EPA	Ereccion de Pueblos, Albay; in PNA
EPCS	Ereccion de Pueblos, Camarines Sur; in PNA
Est. Tip.	Establecimiento Tipográfico (typographical establishment, press)
F	Filipinas; in AGI
FO	Foreign Office; in PRO
GPO	Government Printing Office (Washington, D.C.)
HDP	Historical Data Papers; in PNL
Imp.	Imprenta (printing-office, press)
JAS	<i>Journal of Asian Studies</i> (Chicago/Berkeley)
JEH	<i>Journal of Economic History</i> (New York)
JSEAH	<i>Journal of Southeast Asian History</i> (Singapore)
JSEAS	<i>Journal of Southeast Asian Studies</i> (Singapore)
L	Legajo (bundle); in AHN
LMM	Lopez Memorial Museum (Pasay City)
MHC	Michigan Historical Collections (Ann Arbor)
MN	Museo Naval (Madrid)
MPAC	Mercados Publicos, Ambos Camarines; in PNA

MRGGP	Manuscript Reports of Governors General of the Philippines; in USNA, RG 350
MS	Manuscrito (manuscript), in BNM and MN
MTISE	<i>Manila Times: Investors and Settlers Edition</i> (Feb. 1910)
NLAC	Newberry Library (Chicago), Ayer Collection
O.R.S.A.	Ordinis Recollectorum Sancti Augustini (Augustinian Recollect)
O.F.M.	Ordinis Fratrum Minorum (Franciscan)
O.P.	Ordinis Praedicatorum (Dominican)
O.S.A.	Ordinis Sancti Augustini (Augustinian)
P	Peso
PHC	Peele, Hubbell & Co.
PHR	<i>Philippine Historical Review</i> (Manila)
P.I.	Philippine Islands
PNA	National Archives of the Philippines (Manila)
PNL	National Library of the Philippines (Manila)
PRO	Public Record Office (London)
PS	<i>Philippine Studies</i> (Manila/Quezon City)
PSSHR	<i>Philippine Social Sciences and Humanities Review</i> (Manila)
R	Robles number; in NLAC
RG	Record Group; in USNA
RIC	U.S., Industrial Commission, <i>Reports</i>
R.P.	Republic of the Philippines
RPC	U.S., War Department, Division/Bureau of Insular Affairs, <i>Reports of the Philippine Commission, 1900–1917</i>
RSN	U.S., Congress, Senate, <i>Report from the Secretary of the Navy, 1842</i>
S.J.	Societas Jesu (Jesuit)
U	Ultramar; in AGI and AHN
UMJEAS	<i>University of Manila Journal of East Asiatic Studies</i>
USNA	U.S., National Archives and Record Service (Washington, D.C.)

PREFACE

Kabikolan is hauntingly beautiful. Situated at the southeastern corner of the island of Luzon, in the Philippines, it is open to both monsoons and thus is perpetually green. Mount Mayon rises nearly 8,000 feet above the town of Legazpi like a tropical Fujiyama, and the blue waters of the Pacific lap the gulf nearby. The Bikolanos, indigenous inhabitants of the region, are a beautiful people, and the traveler is always refreshed by their courtesy and generosity.

Yet the history of Kabikolan, like any other regional or local history, must also justify itself to those who do not know the region or its people if it hopes to transcend its resemblance to a mere filiopietistic chronicle. For this potentially larger audience it must contribute to the understanding of some larger historical problem. Nineteenth-century Kabikolan lends itself particularly to a study of the transition from an overwhelmingly subsistence-oriented agrarian economy ("material life," in Braudel's term) to one characterized by a strong export sector based on the production of a single crop for sale to a global market.

Such a study may be useful in two complementary ways. First, it is one piece of an enormous mosaic depicting the epic expansion of the European-based world-economy to the remotest corners of the earth. The origins of that modern world-system have been analyzed in the controversial but stimulating works of Braudel and Wallerstein, among others. The end results we see around us today: all of Asia, all of Africa, all of Latin America have now been or are now being incorporated into this global system.¹ But the full history of this incorporation—the mosaic—still remains to be (re)constructed of a myriad of pieces, each unique. Even within the Philippines, the impact of capitalism on nineteenth-century Kabikolan must be distinguished from its impact on eighteenth-century Pampanga or twentieth-century Mindanao. This book, then, is one of the "necessary building blocks that will someday

1. Fernand Braudel, *Capitalism and Material Life, 1400–1800* (New York, 1973); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System* (New York, 1974).

help in the construction of a substantial edifice," not just for Philippine historiography, but for world history.²

The history of Kabikolan need not lie unused until all the other pieces of the mosaic or edifice are assembled, however. It may also serve as a case study of the process and results of incorporation into the world-system, suggesting—though certainly not dictating—what form the larger picture may eventually assume. No single case study will prove or disprove any general historical theory, but there are reasons to believe that the history of Kabikolan may be particularly suitable for comparative analysis. The region is geographically well defined, and this helps the writer to situate the historical actors in a specific physical context, so that they are not, in Michelet's words, "walking on air, as in those Chinese pictures where the ground is wanting."³ The indigenous population at the start of the nineteenth century was almost ethno-linguistically homogeneous, so that "outsiders" to the region can often be distinguished even when their precise origins are unknown. Only one major export industry—the growing, processing, and transportation of abaca, or "Manila hemp"—emerged during the nineteenth century as a possible basis for regional economic development. Abaca was not exported until 1818; by 1918 it reached its peak as the major export of the Philippines and the mainstay of the regional economy; by the Great Depression it had collapsed again. Thus there is also a logical period to study, one great economic cycle (or "intercycle") just over a century in length. A well-defined area, population, industry, and era may aid us in isolating the critical factors in economic continuity and change.⁴

Among the regions of the Third World incorporated into the modern world-system, Kabikolan was relatively fortunate. It was never subjected to extensive forced labor or to the intrusion of huge Western-owned plantations, two of the classic colonial modes of inducing export production. Thus it seems to be an exception to the general rule that the peripheries of the world-economy were characterized by coerced labor, as in sixteenth-century eastern Europe and the Americas.⁵ Instead, the

2. John A. Larkin, "The Place of Local History in Philippine Historiography," *JSEAH* 8 (Sept. 1967): 317; cf. J. H. Hexter, "Fernand Braudel and the *Monde Braudellian* . . .," *Journal of Modern History* 44 (Dec. 1972): 510–11, 532–33.

3. *Préface de l'histoire de France* (1869), quoted in Lucien Febvre, in collaboration with Lionel Bataillon, *A Geographical Introduction to History*, trans. E. G. Mountford and J. H. Paxton (1924; reprint ed., New York: Barnes & Noble, 1966), pp. 9–10.

4. Fernand Braudel, "Time, History, and the Social Sciences," trans. Sian France, in *The Varieties of History: from Voltaire to the Present*, ed. Fritz Stern, rev. ed. (New York: Random House, 1972), pp. 403–29; Hexter, pp. 502–6; Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *The Peasants of Languedoc* (Urbana, 1974), pp. 289–311.

5. Wallerstein, pp. 99–105, 300–44; cf. Karl J. Pelzer, "The Resource Pattern of Southeast Asia," in *South Asia in the World Today*, ed. Phillips Talbot (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950), p. 109, who states that colonial powers increased agricultural production either

commercialization of its agriculture came about through the response of indigenous landowners to economic incentives, a fact which challenges those theorists who posit cultural conservatism or some immaturity of values for the failure of Southeast Asia to develop economically. Colonialism, moreover, was generally less oppressive in the Philippines than in other areas, such as French Indochina and the Netherlands Indies. Both Spain and the United States were too preoccupied with other concerns and too ambivalent in their colonial aims to exploit this remote colony efficiently. Meanwhile, the global demand for the principal product of Kabikolan increased continually, if erratically, for more than a century—long enough to bring some material improvement to the region, in contrast to the pauperization suffered elsewhere in the world under the impact of colonialism and capitalism.

This, then, is a case study of almost optimum relations between the Third World and the Western world-system. Its theme is not degradation and oppression but real—if slight and short-lived—improvement in the material welfare of the Bikolanos. To this extent it would seem to refute those who argue that the Third World invariably suffers from contact with the West or with capitalism, and perhaps even to corroborate some claims of the putative blessings of imperialism. In the long run, however, this temporary prosperity failed to lead to real progress, as if it contained within itself its own limits and thus its own demise.⁶ Reflection on this may teach us more about the problem of persistent poverty and the relationship between underdevelopment and the position of a given economy on the periphery of the world-system than would a study of more blatant exploitation for which simple human cruelty and greed might be held responsible.

Most analyses of Third World poverty take as their basic unit of analysis the nation-state. A case study of a regional economy, therefore, can scarcely resolve all the controversies among various theorists of development and dependency.⁷ The history of Kabikolan may, however, help to discredit a simplistic Rostovian developmentalism which credits economic performance entirely to internal factors such as entrepreneurship, social values, and industrial discipline. The rises and falls of the abaca industry and, by extension, of the regional economy as a whole are

through “the application of pressure on the peasantry” or through “large-scale plantation agriculture.”

6. Cf. Le Roy Ladurie, p. 293, “The tragedy of Languedoc, in the third phase, was not . . . the decline [of agricultural production], but its failure to grow significantly.”

7. Susanne Bodenheimer, “Dependency and Imperialism: The Roots of Latin American Underdevelopment,” in *Readings in U.S. Imperialism*, ed. K. T. Fann and Donald C. Hodges (Boston, 1971), pp. 155–81; Aidan Foster-Carter, “From Rostow to Gunder Frank,” *World Development* 4 (Mar. 1976): 167–80; Charles W. Bergquist, *Alternative Approaches to the Problem of Development* (Durham, N. C., 1979).

inexplicable without reference to international economic forces over which neither the Bikolanos nor their rulers had any real control. Moreover, the capacity of Bikolanos to respond to these market forces was always constrained by the presence of colonialism, which set the local rules of the game.

This book is a study of how the rise and eventual decline of abaca in Kabikolan affected the development of that region. The first half of the book explores the rise of the export industry, showing how a strong market sector evolved from a traditional subsistence economy without either governmental coercion or substantial investment of foreign capital in plantations. In the second half of the book the rest of the regional economy is explored in an effort to analyze the failure of Kabikolan to capitalize on the rise of abaca or to transcend its decline. Through examination of the persistence of a strong subsistence sector, the vicissitudes of other commercial enterprises, and the uneven growth of the tertiary sector, we may begin to understand one often-ignored aspect of Third World history—the paradox of truncated development.

All of this analysis of the significance of the history of Kabikolan is in a sense incidental to the history itself. Whatever the historian's original aims, history comes to have its own life and demands to tell its own tale. Even for the *Annales* school this is true, and beneath their efforts to write an *histoire totale* can be seen an appreciation of the particularities of, for example, the peasants of Languedoc as well as of the generalities and *conjonctures* which their history supports. The Bikolanos—600,000 of them at the turn of the century; 3,000,000 by now—deserve their own history, and if this is not their *histoire totale* it is at the least a contribution toward it: "the repeated movements, the silent and half-forgotten story of men and enduring realities."⁸

The sources available for the study of nineteenth-century Kabikolan are limited almost entirely to travelers' accounts and bureaucratic archives.⁹ The former, even when perceptive, are necessarily superficial. In the latter, though the Bikolanos sometimes speak, it is not with their own voice. The words are in Spanish and spoken to Spaniards, shaped to fit themselves to a colonial ear. It is possible to write from these sources a history of the Bikolanos, yet such a history has its limitations. It will necessarily be more behavioral than phenomenological, stronger on the material facts of ecology, technology, and economics than on culture, religion, or local perceptions of events.

8. Braudel, *Capitalism*, p. xv; cf. Hexter, pp. 522–29.

9. Norman Goodner Owen, "Kabikolan in the Nineteenth Century: Socio-economic Change in the Provincial Philippines" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1976), pp. xii–xvii, 577–629.

It is unjust, of course, to limit the history of Kabikolan to economic continuity and change. "The people of that age," Ladurie reminds us, "had other things on their mind besides the gross product."¹⁰ Bikolanos were poets, musicians, priests, and tale-tellers; many of them were inveterate gamblers, and some were wine-bibbers. They also were and are devout Christians, perhaps more solidly Roman Catholic than any other Philippine people.¹¹ Regrettably, however, in attempting to analyze the integration of Kabikolan into the modern world-system we can hardly hope to do justice to these other truths. Often, instead, we wind up reducing the romance of Bikol history to its bare socioeconomic bones. The devout and colorful fiesta of Our Lady of Peñafrancia, the songs and the plays (most now forgotten), the piety and the family life, the customs, costumes, and cuisine all seem to slip away from us. They are at this time insufficiently known to be combined with economic history in a true *histoire totale*. It will take new sources—perhaps even a native's familiarity with the subtleties of a largely unwritten culture—to reintegrate the Bikolanos fully into their own history.¹²

The culture of Kabikolan was so vital that even though it was not considered important by colonial authorities, it kept spilling over into bureaucratic documents as well as travelers' tales. The historian is constantly reminded that his conclusions are merely arbitrary abstractions from the lives of real and vibrant people, people whose lives embraced more than the maximizing of economic opportunity or the search for avenues of social mobility. If this fact does not shine through this study, the fault is not the Bikolanos', but mine.

10. Le Roy Ladurie, p. 291.

11. The implications (for the Weber thesis, etc.) of such staunch Catholicism associated with responsiveness to capitalist incentives are beyond the scope of this study. A pioneering debate on religion and economics in the Philippines may be found in *Philippine Economic Journal*, vols. 1–3 (1962–64).

12. Contributions toward a cultural history of Kabikolan include James J. O'Brien, S. J., ed., *The Historical and Cultural Heritage of the Bicol People* (City of Naga, 1968); Luis General, Jr., Lydia S.D. San Jose, and Rosalio Al. Parrone, eds., *Readings on Bikol Culture* (City of Naga, 1972); Francis X. Lynch, S. J., "An Mga Asuwang: A Bicol Belief," *PSSHR* 14 (Dec. 1949): 401–27; Cecilia M. Carpio, "A Study of Bikol Metrical Romances" (M.A. thesis, University of the Philippines, 1959); Lilia Ma. Fuentebella Realubit, "A Study of Popular Drama in Bikol" (M.A. thesis, University of the Philippines, 1961); and Merito B. Espinas, "A Critical Study of the Ibálong, the Bikol Folk Epic-Fragment," *Unitas* 41 (June 1968): 173–250.

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these friends both shared with me specific information on Kabikolan and debated with me the larger questions of Philippine history. The dissertation from which parts of this book are derived was completed under the able and amiable co-chairmanship of Drs. David Joel Steinberg and John K. Whitmore. Various drafts of all or part of the manuscript of this book were read and commented upon by Drs. John Broomfield, Daniel Doeppers, Liam Hunt, Joel Samoff, Peter C. Smith, Thomas Trautmann, and two anonymous readers for the University of California Press. Though I grumbled at first at all criticism, I almost always found, once the hurt to my pride was assuaged, that I profited from it—though my revisions may not satisfy any of these readers.

I should also like to pay tribute here to two of my early mentors, Drs. Poon-Kan Mok and Malcolm Caldwell, neither of whom lived to see me complete this. Each helped, in very different ways, to make me the scholar I am today, and I hope this book is worthy of their memory.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

Throughout this book the careful reader will notice what appear to be inconsistencies with regard to Hispanic names and terms. These stem from the fact that although most of the documentation employed is in Spanish, and most Filipinos today have "Hispanized" names, the Philippines is not a Spanish-speaking country and has adapted Spanish usages according to its own customs. In this volume accents are given as they appear in the original in direct quotations, such as the titles of documents. Otherwise the names of Spaniards and Spanish institutions are generally spelled in accordance with current Iberian usage, including accents; thus José Ma. Peñaranda, Sección de Ultramar. Names of Filipinos and "Philippinized" institutions, on the other hand, are recorded in accordance with local usage, so most accents are omitted; thus Jose Rizal, Eleccion de Gobernadorcillos. Similarly, as Filipinos tend to incorporate the Hispanic prefixes "de" and "de la" into their surnames, they are cited in this form; thus Horacio de la Costa (Filipino) is cited as "de la Costa," whereas Félix de Huerta (Spaniard) is simply cited as "Huerta." For ease of reference, however, both are alphabetized under the (capitalized) surname proper.

A different kind of inconsistency may appear with regard to dates. A single fiscal year that does not coincide with the calendar year is indicated by two dates separated by a slash (e.g., 1796/97). The use of a hyphen (e.g., 1796-97), on the other hand, refers to the entire two-year period or to events or data located sometime within it.